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THE ANONYMOUS HYMNS OF SAMUEL LONGFELLOW

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On February 27, 1917, I had occasion to spend some hours in the library of Union Theological Seminary in New York, looking over the admirable collection of hymnody on the Seminary's shelves. As I came to the collection of Unitarian hymn-books I opened by chance a copy of the *Unitarian Hymn and Tune Book* (1877), when a letter fell from the volume. Picking it up I recognized the handwriting of Samuel Longfellow and saw that the letter had to do with certain of his hymns. It ran as follows:

"GERMANTOWN [Pa.] Nov. 18 [1880].

DEAR SIR:—

I have known of your interest in Hymnology and am glad to come into communication with you.

'Flung to the heedless winds' is certainly not my version. I do not know whose it is, nor why Dr. Martineau sh^d have attributed it to me (as he did Dr. Hedge's version of Luther's 'Ein' feste Burg'). I am pretty sure that it was copied into the *B. of Hymns* from the Cheshire Collection. Perhaps President Livermore of Meadville could tell you about it. I have a collection of Luther's Hymns in German. There is only one of them which bears any resemblance to this, and that only in one verse. It is a very long Hymn, a sort of ballad about two young men put to death at Strasburg for their protestantism. If the H. in question be taken from that, as I suppose, it is a very free paraphrase.

Of the *Anons* in the *H. of the Spirit* a good many are hymns so much changed as not to be honestly attributed to anybody. Others were of authorship really unknown to us at the time, though since discovered, as in Martineau's new book. I should be glad to know

of any whose author you have found, if not in his book. I may say that Hymns 585 and 330 are mine. I did not put my name because two lines in the former and one line in the latter were not mine. 550 founded on a H. of Wesley is nearly all mine. 127 and 368 are mine but are of no importance.

Can you tell me anything of a 'Hymn of the Calabrian peasants,' upon wh. 60 (*H. of Sp.*) is founded. I tho't it was by Mrs. Hemans, but cannot find it in her volumes.

I will try to look up some dates. The only thing to add to my biography w^d be my settlement in Germantⁿ in 1878.

Very Truly,

SAM^l LONGFELLOW.

438 (*H. of Sp.*) I versified from a passage in one of Martineau's sermons."

The letter was so folded that the signature and this postscript first met my eye. As I glanced at the latter the thought flashed across me that here was a clue to the authorship of the hymn beginning,

"He who himself and God would know."

That hymn has not infrequently been assigned to Dr. James Martineau, being obviously based upon a passage from one of his sermons.¹ It does not appear, however, in any one of Dr. Martineau's three collections, nor was it ever acknowledged by him, so that it has generally

¹ It may be interesting to compare the hymn with the passage. Martineau writes:

"Let any true man go into silence; strip himself of all pretence and selfishness and sensuality and sluggishness of soul; lift off thought after thought, passion after passion, till he reaches the inmost depth of all; remember how short a time, and he was not at all; how short a time again, and he will not be here; open his window and look upon the night, how still its breath, how solemn its march, how deep its perspective, how ancient its forms of light; and think how little he knows except the perpetuity of God, and the mysteriousness of life—and it will be strange if he does not feel the Eternal Presence as close upon his soul, as the breeze upon his brow; if he does not say, 'O Lord, art Thou ever near as this, and have I not known thee?' if the true proportions and the genuine spirit of life do not open on his heart with infinite clearness, and show him the littleness of his temptations and the grandeur of his trust. He is ashamed to have found weariness in toil so light, and tears where there was no trial to the brave. He discovers with astonishment how small the dust that has blinded him, and from the height of a quiet and holy love looks down with incredulous sorrow on the jealousies and fears and irritations that have vexed his life. A mighty wind of resolution sets

been printed as anonymous. It was evident that the hymn-numbers in Mr. Longfellow's letter did not refer to the volume from which the letter had slipped, so I ran my eye along the shelf until it lighted upon *Hymns of the Spirit*, the notable collection by Samuel Longfellow and Samuel Johnson, published in 1864. I turned eagerly to number 438. It was indeed,

"He who himself and God would know,"

and against it was a pencilled note, "S. Longfellow from Martineau's sermons." In the index it was entered simply as "From Martineau." This was a most interesting discovery. I turned next to the other hymns to which Mr. Longfellow referred in his letter, and found entered against each the information which he had given about them. Folded into the volume was also a post-

in strong upon him and freshens the whole atmosphere of his soul; sweeping down before it the light flakes of difficulty, till they vanish like snow upon the sea. He is imprisoned no more in a small compartment of time, but belongs to an eternity which is now and here. The isolation of his separate spirit passes away; and with the countless multitude of souls akin to God, he is but as a wave of His unbounded deep. He is at one with Heaven, and hath found the secret place of the Almighty."

"Endeavors After the Christian Life."
Sermon 17, "Silence and Meditation."

Longfellow's versification runs:

"He who himself and God would know,
Into the silence let him go,
And, lifting off pall after pall,
Reach to the inmost depth of all.

"Let him look forth into the night;
What solemn depths, what silent might!
Those ancient stars, how calm they roll—
He but an atom 'mid the whole.

"And, as the evening wind sweeps by,
He needs must feel his God as nigh;
Must needs that unseen Presence own,
Thus always near, too long unknown.

"How small, in that uplifted hour,
Temptation's lure and passion's power!
How weak the foe that made him fall,
How strong the soul to conquer all!

"A mighty wind of nobler will
Sends through his soul its quickening thrill;
No more a creature of the clod,
He knows himself a child of God."

card from Mr. Longfellow, addressed to Rev. F. M. Bird, of Lehigh University, a well known hymnologist, one of the contributors to Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology*. Evidently the letter had also been addressed to him and had been slipped into another volume by mistake, after Mr. Bird had made his annotations. Mr. Bird's hymn-books were, apparently, later bought by Mr. Henry Day, another collector of the last century, from whom they had come to Union Seminary.

The little volume with its annotations has, upon further study, provided additional facts of interest regarding Mr. Longfellow's hymns, especially when compared with his *Hymns and Verses* published in 1894, after his death (1892). The preface of that collection, written by his niece Miss Alice Longfellow, speaks of *Hymns of the Spirit* as containing "twenty-two original hymns by Mr. Longfellow, but three of these are marked anonymous in the index, as Mr. Longfellow wished to avoid the appearance of introducing too much of himself into the book. The hymn 'Holy Spirit, Truth divine' bears some resemblance to one of Andrew Reed's hymns, but after careful investigation proves to be quite distinct from it." Comparing the annotated copy of *Hymns of the Spirit* with the collection of *Hymns and Verses* I found that the former contained not twenty-two but twenty-three of Mr. Longfellow's hymns later included in *Hymns and Verses*, namely the nineteen which are ascribed to him in the index, including "Holy Spirit, Truth divine," and four others, set down as anonymous, namely:

- 127. "Father, give thy benediction."
- 330. "God of the earth, the sky, the sea."
- 485. "I look to thee in every need."
- 676. "God's trumpet wakes the slumbering world."

But Mr. Longfellow's letter reveals four more hymns in *Hymns of the Spirit* to which he had some claim, but

which are not to be found in *Hymns and Verses*. They are as follows:

368. "O Father, fix this wavering will,"

to which he refers as "of no importance";

550. "God of truth! thy sons should be,"

to which he made no claim because it was founded upon a hymn of Wesley's, although "nearly all mine";

585. "Every bird that upward springs,"

which, writing in 1880, he says he did not claim because "two lines . . . were not mine," but which in the index of *Hymns of the Spirit* he assigned to Neale; and

438. "He who himself and God would know,"

the hymn versified from Martineau which he did not claim because he evidently felt that it belonged to Martineau rather than to himself, and which he therefore entered in the index as "From Martineau." *Hymns of the Spirit*, therefore, contained not twenty-two but twenty-seven hymns to the authorship of which he felt that he had some claim.

Mr. Longfellow's habit of rewriting hymns by earlier authors, or of appropriating a line or two upon which to build a fresh hymn, has made it peculiarly difficult to identify the hymns which are wholly his. He evidently desired scrupulously to refrain from claiming hymns which were not wholly from his own pen, but it is interesting to note that hymn 330 in *Hymns of the Spirit*,

"God of the earth, the sky, the sea,"

to which he did not put his name because two lines were not his, has been included as his in *Hymns and Verses*. It is much more surprising that he should have put his name in *Hymns of the Spirit* to the hymn

"Holy Spirit, Truth divine,"

for, in spite of Miss Alice Longfellow's disclaimer, it is extremely difficult to avoid the conviction that Mr. Longfellow's hymn was directly founded on the well-known hymn by Andrew Reed, published in 1817,

"Holy Ghost, with light divine."

The similarity of the two hymns does not, indeed, extend beyond the first two lines of the first stanza and the first line of each succeeding stanza, but though Mr. Longfellow completely rewrote the rest of the hymn, something of Reed's nevertheless remains in it. In some modern collections the hymn appears as a composite of Reed's and Longfellow's versions, while in the new *Congregational Hymnary*, published by the Congregational Society of England and Wales, 1916, Longfellow's version of the hymn appears with still further alterations, presumably by one of the editors of the *Hymnary*. Mr. Longfellow's letter to Mr. Bird also illustrates a curious trick which his memory played him in permitting him to claim that all but two lines of hymn number 585 in *Hymns of the Spirit* ("Every bird that upward springs") were his own. He made that statement in 1880, thirty-two years after he had adapted the hymn from Neale for the 1848 *Supplement* to the *Book of Hymns*. Now as a matter of fact the hymn consists of stanzas 4, 5, 6, and 7, of Neale's Hymn for St. Andrew's Day, included in his *Hymns for Children*, 1842. Of the sixteen lines in Longfellow's version nine are taken unchanged from Neale, six contain part of Neale's wording, and only one is wholly Longfellow's! No one, of course, at all acquainted with Mr. Longfellow's character would dream of accusing him of consciously claiming as his own the work of another. With the lapse of years his own contribution to the completed product had come to bulk larger than it really was; he had simply forgotten how much he was indebted to Neale. Miss Longfellow also mis-

takenly included in *Hymns and Verses*, as an anonymous hymn of her uncle's, another to which he never made any claim, namely the translation from the Paris *Breviary* beginning "Supreme Disposer of the heart." It is in reality the work of John Chandler, and in both the 1848 *Supplement* to the *Book of Hymns* and in *Hymns of the Spirit* (1864) is entered as "Breviary."

One other pencilled note in the Union Seminary copy of *Hymns of the Spirit* suggests a problem for which I have no answer. Number 485 is Longfellow's exquisite hymn,

"I look to Thee in every need,"

printed as "Anon.," though included as his in *Hymns and Verses*. But in the margin is pencilled "v. 1, T. H. Bayley alt." Who was Bayley, and did he write some verses from which Mr. Longfellow drew his inspiration for this hymn? Was that why Mr. Longfellow did not acknowledge it in *Hymns of the Spirit*?

With the identification of these hymns contributed anonymously by Mr. Longfellow to *Hymns of the Spirit* we probably have a complete list of everything in the way of hymns which he wrote. It is a satisfaction to the student of hymnody to be able thus to trace more conclusively the songs of the writer who has made what is probably a more precious contribution in song to the religious life of America than any other nineteenth-century writer.